Area couple's book tells story of Belleville history

By JUDSON BRANAM

Press Staff Writer
11-24-1987
BELLEVILLE — While longtime residents of a community often develop an interest in its history, not many are willing to invest large amounts of money and effort to see that history organized into a book.

Park and Edna Mae Gregory of Belleville are among the few who have undertaken such a project.

After many hours of research and an investment of more than \$20,000, their hopes of keeping Belleville's historical materials available to future generations were realized in September, with the publication of "See Again: A Pictorial. History Belleville"

The book relies on local newspaper accounts and governmental meeting minutes. along with 550 photographs. to tell Belleville's history through the last century.

In addition, several chapters deal with special events and aspects of the town's history, such as the Belleville High School fire of 1953; a transcribed tape of a 1976 luncheon in which 15 thencurrent and former city/village officials discussed their memories of the town; and photographs of all presentday businesses, churches and schools in town preserved for future historians.

It also includes the family trees of several longtime Belleville families.

Park said his favorite section of the book deals with an 1886 murder that happened on Main Street, when one participant in a barroom brawl that had spilled outside took



Press photo by Paul Hurschmann

The Gregorys at their home 'office' in Belleville.

a shot at another, striking a bystander. The intended target, Park said, was the grandfather of current Belleville City Counil member Richard Akens.

To prepare the 540-page book, the Gregorys spent about a year and a half researching, compiling and typing full-time, after years of gathering material for its own sake.

"We're sort of history buffs," said Park, a retired

chemistry, physics and electronics teacher in the Belleville and Taylor schools. "so we'd latch onto something interesting and file it away, never thinking we'd put it into a book."

The idea of a book came about when the Gregorys looked for some photos they knew a late acquaintance had owned

"His relatives had lost

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their dogs and birds. Programs are free, and pe

at Plymouth and Cherry Hil House in the Village of Dixbor p.m. at the Red Historic Schoo Both seminars will begin at '

tion and answer period.

provided to dog owners on Tuesday, and to bird owners grooming and training will be Tips on feeding, health care,

Society of Huron Valley. for pet owners by the Humane will be held Tuesday and Dec. 8 Free dog and bird care clinics

Dog, bird clinics planned

to 2 p.m. p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m through Friday from 9 a.m. to Ford Gallery is open Monda

dozens of private collections. Museum of the Twentieth Cer ter in Vienna, Austria an American Art, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden ern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whitney Museum tute of Chicago, Museum of Mod in the collections of the Art Inst Hunt, 52, has works include

sor in the Humanities. sity's 1987-88 McAndless Profe at EMU this year as the univer

Hunt is teaching art courses

located in Ford Hall on EMU's Monday in EMU's Ford Gallery, held for Hunt from 3 to 6 p.m. An opening reception will be

Gallery. versity's Ford -inUnsgidsiM 22 in Eastern through Dec. play Monday -sib no ad Iliw Richard Hunt artist and graphics

to be displayed on campus Works of EMU art teacher

launched a fund-raising drive in cent as well as adult clients. pay for ity at Dawn Farm that wi n Farm allow the admission of adole Plans call for the constru

am additional \$257,000 by Ma

Dawn To help Road. ity on its farm on Stony Creek tion of a 6,200-square-foot faci wants to build a residence facilprogram 1, 1988. The 14-year-old \$750,000 building project.

Kresge Foundation as part of a grant, Dawn Farm must rais tation program in Ypsilanti So far, \$492,039 has bee Township, has been awarded a raised by the non-profit grou \$100,000 challenge grant by the To accept the Kresge challen Dawn Farm, a drug rehabili- September 1986.

Kresge's \$100,000 grant Dawn Farm receives

Recreati information, call Sandy Prochazka, 66 OF TRUSTEES, work session, 7 p.m., civic center, 7200 S. Huron River Drive. ...VAN BUREN TOWNSHIP PLAN-

lunch lectures EMU to present

Wednesday night. ter the typhoon struck late thousands were homeless af-To berband bas berujai erew missing, more than 1,000 Scores of people Were Sorsogon province. land's villages on southern Luzon issmashed coastal towns and churned up by typhoon Nina killed when giant waves At least 500 people were — səniqqilidq ,A.IINAM

500 killed in storm

their escape. lice where they explained then taken to West Berlin potheir daring swim. They were men, drenched and cold, walked into a bar following across the icy waters of a canal. Police said the two West Berlin by swimming old East Berliners fled to BEKLIN - Two 22-year-

2 E. Berliners escape

border. BuiniY near Soviet the Urumqi and the town in jo fistiges lisionivorg gasifal of of highway between the Xinand narrow 22-mile stretch hicles were stuck on a steep ple traveling in about 300 vearea of western China. Peo-

officer from Madera, Calif. computer company financial Kussen risn, a 24-year-old

Book

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them," Park said, "and we realized that a lot of the history of Belleville was just being lost, so we tried to find as much as we could and put it into a book so it would be around for a while.

Their book is the third effort at preserving area history, but the first devoted exclusively to Belleville. In 1930, Samuel Robbe published "The History of Van Buren Township," and in 1977, Cathy Horste and Diane Wilson's "Water Under the Bridge: A History of Van Buren Township" was published with support from the township's bicentennial commission.

The Gregorys said they chose to quote directly from the old Belleville Enterprise issues to give modern readers as much "feel" for the language and events of the day as possible.

Those clippings include

many gems such as:

— "Farmers Beware! There are sharpers around the country who are selling ... hens' eggs for \$75 per dozen and agreeing purchase all chickens hatched from these eggs at \$100 each. The enterprise is safe, for just relieved that it's done and

the sharper, the eggs are all cooked (April 21, 1886)."

- "We chronicle two sad accidents for Monday in our little town. One man burnt down his hen coop while trying to fire out the chicken lice and a dog had his head cut off on the railroad (June 16, 1886)."

- "A light weight son put in an appearance at Robert Franciscoes last week. Another subject for the measles, chickenpox and whooping cough (April 11, 1888)."

- "The blacksmiths here are wearing broad smiles on account of the slippery times for horses (Dec. 23, 1903)."

Since the book's release, the Gregorys said they have received positive comments from throughout the community, with adults and children alike "extremely enthusiastic about the book," Park said.

Edna added that "It really makes you feel proud when people say they like it so much," to which Park replied, "We've worried over it so much that I'm it's appreciated."

The book is the second major investment the Gregorys have made in preserving Belleville's heritage. After learning that the French explorer LaSalle passed through the area, the Gregorys paid \$17,000 to see a statue of him erected in Victory Park. The book's cover includes a drawing of the statue, and the book opens with "The LaSalle Saga."

"Anything worthwhile costs you money nowadays," Edna explained. "I could probably spend \$17,000 and drive a Cadillac, but I'd rather leave something everybody." of

Besides, Park added with a a \$17,000 tombstone down at Hillside (Cemetery)."

The book sells for \$23, which Park said is "a few pennies less than it cost us to publish it." He said about half of its 1,000-copy printing is still available for sale. Copies can be obtained from the authors, 375 Brain Ave., Belleville, 48111.